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ABSTRACT

Efforts to incorporate video-based exercises into a first-year Irish second language course at the University of Minnesota are reported and illustrated. Sample activities using sound and word recognition, matching, listening, completion, and creation techniques are outlined. Videotape recordings are first played without sound to introduce students to the physical aspects of the cultural setting and to provide a stimulus for vocabulary being learned. Listening practice, observation, and discussion follow. Considerations in creating homemade videotapes, selecting commercially designed materials, and managing the use of these materials in class are discussed, and the instructional potential in student development of videos is examined. Three appendices contain worksheets in Irish. (MSE)

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Video in the Irish Language Classroom*

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As teachers and learners of less commonly taught languages such as the Celtic languages are well aware, language acquisition can be seriously handicapped by a lack of adequate learning materials compared with what is available for more commonly taught languages.[1] In the case of Irish, there may in fact be a greater variety of pedagogical materials available than for many other lesser taught languages in the U.S. (such as Swedish, Hindi, Polish, and the like), due to the constant population of learners within Ireland, but most available texts target audiences other than North American adults and even those which do have this group in mind are flawed in various ways that limit their usefulness.[2] For example, exercises enabling creative use of the language are virtually nonexistent in even the best of the published texts, and most lack all but the most minimal visual assistance to learners and are often weak in their presentation of authentic language material.[3] Teachers must therefore produce their own exercises and aids to teaching, piece together usable samples of authentic language from various sources, and find ways to integrate them with the primary text(s).

One teaching aid which can help to serve all these needs is videotape, which has seen enormous growth in language teaching in recent years.[4] Increasingly, materials including video as an integral component of a course are appearing for those languages with a large textbook market, as a glance at any catalogue for French, Spanish, or ESL materials will show. Video materials have begun to appear for some lesser taught languages as well, such as Russian, Chinese, and Japanese. But on the whole less commonly taught languages, including the Celtic languages, which are correspondingly less well served by the textbook publishing industry, suffer all the more where audio-visual resources are concerned. Fortunately, however, video is a versatile medium, and even videotaped material intended for other audiences can be adapted for use with language learners.

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This paper will report and illustrate recent efforts to incorporate video-based exercises into a first-year university-level Irish class, using a variety of video sources. Examples will be presented and discussed, showing how their use has helped to bring the language alive in class and to provide a synthesis of grammar and vocabulary from the textbook in ways that make them more meaningful and memorable for the students. Not only has student response to video-based activities been overwhelmingly positive, but their oral and written work consistently shows its effectiveness; vocabulary and structures learned and used in these activities tend to be better retained than those introduced through the textbook and traditional drillwork alone and to resurface in spontaneous language use with a higher degree of accuracy.

The benefits of using video materials for language instruction are well known (cf. (Johnson, 1991) (Hennessey, 1995)) and will be summarized only briefly here. Video offers an excellent means of presenting authentic language integrated with visual cues (setting, gesture, facial expression) which not only assist comprehension but provide essential cultural context for the learning task. It offers exposure to a variety of voices, styles, registers and dialects. Visual input has been found to enhance learning for most students (cf. (Felder & Henriques, 1995) p. 24). And because ours is a media-saturated world and most students today have grown up with television, students welcome and sometimes have even come to expect the availability of such learning tools. The motivational factor is by no means a trivial one in creating an effective learning environment.

While listening comprehension perhaps springs to mind most readily as the role of classroom video, it can also be used as a framework for speaking exercises, as we shall see. Materials can vary widely, indeed perhaps should do so. In my classes I use both commercial and homemade tapes, tapes made for both children and adults, and material aimed at both Irish speakers and English speakers, as well as some materials unrelated to Ireland altogether. All have proved to have a place and to elicit positive response from students. Video production by the students themselves is also advantageous in offering a chance for creative use of language free from classroom-imposed structure, yet with time for planning and preparation to maximize the quality of the final product.

It might appear that the level of language in authentic video materials would be beyond that of students in a beginning class. But in fact, appropriateness to

level is determined as much by the activities designed to go with the video as by the language it contains, and anything can be useful at any level, as long as we remember that full comprehension is not always necessary--a valuable lesson for learners to have in any case. Table 1 provides a list of possible activity types for use with video, including activities for various skill levels from the simplest recognition exercises to more creative advanced-level language production. Discussion of specific examples from my own classes at the University of Minnesota follows.

TABLE 1

Sample Video Activities[5]

Recognition

Raise hand/clap/snap fingers when a sound/word/grammar form is heard
Write specific forms heard
Circle forms on handout as heard
Order dialogue or event cards

Listing

Everything you see on screen
Description (characters, places, background, etc.)
Actions--various tenses
Cultural differences

Matching

Dialogue to picture
Dialogue to character
Adjective to character
Synonyms to words heard on video

Completion

Cloze synopsis of plot
Missing dialogue fill-in
Event charts, timelines
Information charts (for news shows, commercials)

Creation

Write dialogue (or half dialogue) for segment of film shown without sound
Write monologue for character who doesn't talk much
Write narrative for missing middle of video
Write ending (before viewing)
Rewrite for character of opposite sex/different age/different setting, etc.
Predict outcomes of individual scenes
Write voiceover commentary
Novelization of film

In the very first weeks, I play video segments without sound to introduce the class to physical aspects of the cultural setting and to provide a culturally appropriate stimulus for using the vocabulary they are acquiring. One useful segment is the opening of a recently broadcast RTÉ soap opera, *Ros na Rún*,

set in Dublin and the Connemara Gaeltacht. Students are asked very simple questions from the first couple of lessons of their text: *An bhfuil siad sásta?* or *Cá bhfuil siad?* which they can answer with single words (*Conamara, an Ghaeltacht, Baile Átha Cliath*) or with limited variations on their first simple sentence type: *Tá sí sásta, Níl seisean sásta,* etc. This provides contextualized pronunciation practice which is meaningful but still simple enough to be non-threatening. Students are also asked to watch and simply list (in Irish) everything they see on the tape. Then in a follow-up exercise, they compare notes, and recheck for the objects that their classmates found but they themselves may have missed. Two minutes of tape can easily generate 20-30 minutes of classroom activity.

Of course, for this naming exercise, any video sequence at all could be used. I have also used sequences from the commercial film *Poitín*, but since the sound is off, the language of the script is actually irrelevant, as long as the scenes are visually appropriate. Any number of films made in Ireland and readily available in any video shop could provide equally useful sequences.

Shown with sound (and subtitles, for absolute beginners), the initial episode of *Ros na Rún* also works well for simple guided listening activities, some of which are illustrated on the exercise sheet in Appendix 1: picking out new Irish vocabulary through the subtitles, identifying English vocabulary common in Gaeltacht conversations, identifying characters by name and dialect. Most other programmes or films could be similarly adapted.

Films in Irish can also be used almost immediately for selective listening practicé to help with sound recognition and discrimination. For instance, the distinction between palatalized and velarized (broad and slender) consonants always troubles beginning learners of Irish. Show the class a few minutes of tape and ask them simply to raise their hands or snap their fingers when they hear a particular sound. Or divide the class in half, one half to listen for broad /L/, the other for slender /L´/. At more advanced stages, they can write down the words they hear that contain the target sounds.

Homemade videotapes are also useful early on in a course for exposing students to a variety of greetings, and for introducing students to traditional Irish music and sean-nós singing. I have also excerpted a series of greetings by different individuals and edited them into a single sequence showing the variety of greeting forms that can be used to accomplish the same function

(*Dia dhuit, Dia is Muire dhuit, hello, cén chaoi a bhfuil tú?, cén chaoi a bhfuil tú ag coinneáil?, cén chaoi a bhfuil an chraic?* etc.)[6]

Materials designed for children can also be a rich source of language for learners. Children's books have been a staple of language learners' reading repertoires for years, and children's video can offer a similar tool for the spoken language. Most students enjoy cartoons, which introduce an element of fantasy that can also be refreshing. Cultural authenticity is not a consideration here, of course, but the extensive visual cues and simplicity of cartoon language can be a powerful learning aid. I have used a French cartoon, *Bouli*, which has been dubbed into Irish for Gaeltacht children, in a very popular classroom and language lab exercise[7]. It is a four-minute segment, on which we spent a 50 minute class period and could easily have spent longer. After an initial viewing of the cartoon and brief discussion of what the class was able to understand of the story, they were given a partial script (see Appendix 2), with words they had previously learned omitted for them to identify and fill in during repeat viewings. For the new vocabulary provided in the script, opportunities for guessing meaning from context were given. The characters all have different accents, providing an opportunity to introduce the class to dialect variation and notice distinctive features of other regional variants in both accent and vocabulary.

A number of commercial films available from Cinegael in Connemara provide more ambitious material for classes.[8] At the beginning level, apart from the vocabulary and sound-identification exercises mentioned above, these must be shown with subtitles, but can still be useful teaching tools, apart from the obvious cultural value. I have shown the feature film *Poitín* over a period of three to four days, to generate simple discussion in Irish of who's who, predictions of what will happen next, inferences to be drawn from the scenes, etc. If desired, closer follow-up viewing of short segments can focus on the language itself--identifying occurrences of particular grammatical patterns the class has been studying: specific tense forms, the genitive case, verbal noun constructions, inflected prepositions, and so on, depending at what point in the course the film is shown. For some of the dialogue, students can also use subtitles as a starting point to reconstruct what the Irish dialogue might have been, even if their listening skills are not yet at a level to permit them to understand the entire message without the aid of the subtitles. After discussing possible ways the speaker might have conveyed the content of a particular line of subtitle, listening again can help focus their attention so that

they can pick up more of the dialogue than they did on the initial viewing and see how close their own attempts to produce the Irish were.

As mentioned earlier, materials unrelated to Ireland can also be of value. I have had success in eliciting student-generated dialogue using a tape of pantomimes called *Speakeasy*, (Silverson, 1983), originally prepared for ESL students. These materials provide a structured way of generating oral language, which can be helpful in overcoming student shyness and reluctance to speak at the early levels of language learning. The pantomimes are intended to be culturally neutral, to let learners fill in from their own imaginations, and since they are also language-free, it is not a difficult matter to adapt and translate the accompanying text materials. Depending on the level of the students and the needs of the class, the text provides from two to five hours of activities for each two-to-three-minute segment. A first viewing is followed by general discussion of the situation depicted (what did you see? what happened?). The scene may then be re-viewed, starting and stopping to discuss events, motives, etc. in more detail. Then the class reconstructs in various stages a dialogue to accompany the scene. One sample which I have used successfully with Irish classes involves a pair of wallflowers at a party, the other takes place in a library. The sample handout in Appendix 3 shows some of the activities we have used with the library scene: ordering events, choosing appropriate language for specific events, creating other ways of conveying the message, and finally creation in pairs of an entire dialogue to accompany the scene, which the authors can then enact as role plays. A number of creative dialogues have emerged from these exercises, including some from students whose spontaneous language use was much more limited in earlier work; the structure and context provided by the video seemed to help bring them out of their shells and allow them to stretch their knowledge of their new language in ways they were normally more reluctant to do.

Finally video production as a class activity should not be overlooked. Student skits have been a popular component of many language classes at the University of Minnesota for years, and, depending on details of the assignment, can be used at any level. They encourage students to work cooperatively in the planning and production of the skit, encourage creative use of the language free from classroom-imposed structure, and in general are fun for the students to produce and watch (at least after the initial shock of the assignment wears off). Skits may be improvised or scripted, taped in class or outside, structured (e.g., as a newscast, or a soap opera) or completely free as

to content. I use skit assignments in the second and third quarters of my course, leaving students free to choose who they work with and what they do. I ask only that they memorize rather than read their lines, and that they provide me in advance with the idea and some preliminary script material so that I can assist with any new language they may need and head off overly ambitious efforts that require language too far beyond their abilities. They may tape the skit either in the university's language media center or on their own. The results have often been quite clever, and some have even proved usable as teaching tools in subsequent classes (with students' permission). One, for example, based on the skit assignment itself and the students' preparation for it, presented several student-generated mnemonics for remembering vocabulary. Another, drawing on a number of cliches from the textbook and various classroom exercises done earlier in the year, provides a short dialogue consisting of several successive sentences using the copula, which could serve as listening practice for future classes studying that construction.

In using video a number of considerations must be taken into account, from choice of appropriate equipment for the materials and class to preparation for the possibility of an equipment failure in the classroom. For those new to classroom video, Table 2 outlines some of the factors to be considered, and includes an all-purpose outline to help structure video-based activities.

Over a fifteen year period teaching Irish at the university level in the U.S., I have moved like many others toward incorporating video supported activities at a number of points during a year-long language sequence. Gradually the class has shifted from one in which the only visuals were pictures cut from magazines to what one recent student described as a "multi-media extravaganza". Since video materials made explicitly for instructional purposes are non-existent, this has meant scrounging and adapting materials created for other purposes. It is a challenging and time consuming process, and has been accomplished at a slow rate, but student response, increased speaking, and improved retention of the language covered in these lessons easily repay the effort.

TABLE 2

Factors to consider in creating and using videotape in class

Equipment selection

1. Home video cameras work well for simple tasks. Sound can be improved by using microphone jacks.
2. For dual screen, titles, and other effects, a special effects generator/video switcher is needed.
3. For playback, be aware that video formats differ by country and maker. Be sure your equipment is compatible with the tape you have, in type, size and format.

Type	Size	Format
a. Reel-to-reel	Varies-usually 1/2"	Uniform
b. Cassette	i) 3/4" (U-Matic)	i) NTSC (N. America)
	ii) 1/2" (VHS, BetaMax)	ii) PAL (Ireland, Britain)
		iii) SECAM (France. E. Europe)

4. Screen size is a concern for playback monitors. In general, a 19" screen can be viewed comfortably by no more than 20-25 students. For larger groups, use two monitors, or video projection with a large screen, if available.

Equipment management

1. Familiarize yourself with the equipment *in advance*. Practice using it before class to avoid delays and basic operation problems.
2. Preview material before using it. Determine how much can be seen from the back of the classroom. Establish sound level.
3. Counter numbers are useful for finding points in mid-tape. Be aware, however, counters vary from maching to machine (see 1).
4. Tapes recorded on Extended Play or Long Play cannot be used with all equipment. This is especially a problem with multi-format machines. Use caution in preparing materials.
5. In playback never leave the pause button on longer than about 60 seconds; to do so may damage the tape.
6. Rewind videotapes after use for correct storage.

Classroom management

1. Be prepared for equipment emergencies. Be ready to summarize or describe tape, or have a backup activity planned.
2. Consider the most effective use of the tape. How many times will students view the tape? How will you prepare them for viewing? How will they use what they have seen?

One format for a 3-5 minute segment (adapted from Silverson (1983)):

a. Prepare class for viewing (e.g. prewriting on a topic)
b. First viewing (no stops).
c. General comprehension activity.
d. Second viewing (planned stops with group activities).
e. Reinforcement activity.
f. Third viewing (no stops).
g. Activity to exploit the tape's language/information.

Appendix 1

Ros na Rún

I. Focail Nua

(Great) Famine:

manager

sweets

congratulations

ears

II. Focail Bhéarla:

III. Canúintí eile. Cé na daoine a bhfuil na blasanna seo leanas acu?

blas Dhún na nGall

blas Chiarraí

blas Bhaile Átha Cliath

blas Chonamara

IV. Cé hiad na daoine seo?

Suzy	an bainisteoir nua
Micheál	an rúnaí i Mil Rí
Seán	ag obair ag Raidió na Gaeltachta
Caitríona	ag iarraidh a bheith ina bhainisteoir
Síle	múinteoir scoile i mBaile Átha Cliath

Appendix 2 - Bouli

Bouli: O, tá na cnónna seo blasta. Deirim go n-íosfaidh mé _____ _____ acu. Bionn deifir ar na _____ dhóiteáin _____. Féach é seo! Thit seo den inneall dóiteáin. An first aid kit! An steiteascóip! Tada ---- Tada ---- _____!

Bouli-Punk: Hé Bouli! An tusa _____ _____ anois?

Bouli: Is mé.

Bouli-Punk: _____, féadfaidh tú _____ a scrùdú. Níl rud ar bith cearr liomsa.

Bouli: O!

Bouli-Punk: Cad é atá ann? Cad é atá cearr? An bhfuil sé _____ _____?

Bouli: An croí. Níl sé _____.

Bouli-Punk: _____ _____ an-tinn?

Bouli-Leadóg: Dheabhais! Céard atá oraibh?

Bouli: _____ an croí go maith. Níl an torann ceart uaidh.

Bouli-Punk: _____ an ceart _____ Bouli. Ní airím go maith. Oh! D'fhéadfainn a bheith an-tinn!

Bouli-Leadóg: Tabhair dhom go bhfeice mé. Is fíor dhuit. Dheabhais, níl an torann _____ ar an _____ seo ar chor ar bith!

iad uilig: Teara anuas, a Bouli-_____! Tá Bouli-Punk an- _____!

Bouli-Eitleán: Ach céard atá air?

Bouli-Leadóg: Dheabhais, tá an croí _____ _____. Seo. Éist leis.

Bouli-Eitleán: Ach, is fíor dhuit. Níl an croí _____ _____ ar chor ar bith. Céard a dhéanfaidh muid?

Bouli-Leadóg: Is _____ _____ _____ é gur dochtúr é Bouli.

Bouli-Eitleán: An dochtúr thú, Bouli?

Bouli: Ummm....

Bouli-Leadóg: Hé. Seo é do chás. Abair linn _____ a dhéanfas _____.

Bouli: Bhoil, fan _____. Déanfaidh muid--, ní 'in é. Oh! Sin é. Cuirfidh muid umm-- bindealán air.

Bouli-Eitleán: Tá go maith, Bouli. Tosóidh muid.

Bouli: Tá muid críochnaithe!

Bouli-Leadóg: Tiocfaidh biseach ann anois, cinnte. Éistóidh muid len a _____ _____ anois, go bhfeicfe muid _____ _____ sé ceart.

Bouli: Bhoil, a dhuine chóir. Cén _____ a n-airíonn tú anois? Níl aon mhaith sa bhindealán. Tá sé níos _____.

Bouli-Leadóg: Triailfaidh muid an _____.

Bouli-Eitleán: Sin é. _____ amháin. Dhá _____. Trí _____.

Bouli-Punk: Stop! _____! Níl me go maith!

Bouli-Leadóg: Dheabhais, níl ach _____ _____ fágtha le triail.

Bouli: Agus céard é?

Bouli-Leadóg: Fan, tá sé _____ anseo.

Bouli: Céard é féin?

Bouli-Leadóg: Séard atá ann, ná-- _____!

Bouli-Punk: Aaa! Tá mé _____!. Tá biseach orm. Tá biseach orm. Tá mé _____!

Bouli: Ach, fan, Bouli-Leadóg. Tá torann _____ ó do chroisa freisin.

Bouli-Leadóg: Aah, níl a Bouli!. Tá _____ ceart!.

Bouli-Eitleán: Agus tá mise folláin _____! Slán!

Appendix 3

Speakeasy Video

A. Céard a tharla?
Cuir uimhir in aice leis na rudaí seo san ord a dtarlaíonn siad.

____ a. Déanann sé sraofartach.
____ b. Imíonn sí.
____ c. Tosaíonn sí ag ithe.
____ d. Beireann sé ar a lámha sise.
____ e. Buaileann sé a lámh ar an mbord.
____ f. Deireann daoine eile leo fanacht ciúin.
____ g. Buaileann sí a méara ar an mbord.
____ h. Leagann sí a huillinn ar a chuid leabhar/páipéar.

B. Cuir na himeachtaí a bhí sa mhím le chéile leis an gcaint fheiliúnach.

1. Cuireann *an fear* ceist ar an mbean.
2. Déanann *sé* clamhsán léi mar gheall ar go bhfuil a huillinn ar a chuid leabhar.
3. Deir *sé* léi gan a méara a bhualadh ar an mbord.
4. Deireann *sé* rud léi nuair a thosaíonn sí ag ithe.

____	Ná déan é sin!	____	Stop de bheith ag déanamh an torainn sin.
____	Ar mhiste leat t'uillinn a bhaint ó mo chuid leabhar?	____	An bhfuil an suíochán sin saor?
____	Níl cead ithe anseo.	____	Tá t'uillinn sa mbealach orm.
____	Ní ceart dhuit ithe anseo.	____	Nach bhfanfá ar do thaobh féin?

Caoi eile:

1. An bhféadfainn _____
2. An bhféadfá _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Footnotes

[*] A version of this paper was presented at the meeting of the North American Association for Celtic Language Teachers in Glendale, California, on March 25, 1995. I am grateful to participants for their feedback, as well as to the anonymous referees for *Teanga*.

[1] In the context of North American higher education, the term Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs) refers to all languages *except* English, French, German, and Spanish. Some LCTLs are, of course taught more frequently than others, but all are represented significantly less than the four named above at all educational levels in most parts of the U.S.

[2] See Ihde (1994a,1994b) for a survey of several Irish texts commonly used in the U.S., and some of their limitations.

[3] Some recently published materials, such as RTE's *Cogar*, are somewhat better in this respect (see Ihde 1994a:91-92,1994b:101-102 for discussion of two of these), although they still do not directly serve all the needs of the North American audience, and visual support material is crucially lacking.

[4] For example, use of the University of Minnesota's Language Center (LC), a media resource center for language teachers, has grown from a few hundred classroom hours in 1978 to 12,000-14,000 hours per year during the period 1991-1994. Most use of the LC is devoted to video viewing or production by language classes.

[5] Adapted in part from Stempleski and Tomalin (1990), Thompson (1991).

[6] This series was taken from a two hour tape that included several speakers sending greetings to a friend in the U.S. Greetings and other varieties of formulaic expression could, of course, be found in any number of contexts including (within the limitations of copyright) feature films, TV programmes, etc.

[7] A language laboratory is not essential to the exercise; all that is needed is a video player and monitor. However, students have found the enhanced audio quality provided by use of headsets in a laboratory setting to be very helpful in their listening practice, especially in the early stages of learning. The laboratory setting also helps some students to focus their attention more closely on the listening task and filter out distractions in the classroom environment.

[8] For information, contact Bob Quinn, Cinegael, An Cheathrú Rua, Conamara, Co. na Gaillimhe, Éire.

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